

Ireland to lead €7 million Parkinson's research project

RCSI-coordinated project to inform future Parkinson's treatment development

Tuesday, 12 March 2019: A new research study aims to deepen the understanding of Parkinson's so that better treatments can be developed in the future. The project, which will be coordinated by RCSI, has been awarded €7m by the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) with pharmaceutical industry and patient advocacy partners.

The PD-MitoQUANT project aims to increase understanding of how cells in the brain become damaged in Parkinson's so more effective treatments can be developed for the one million people living with Parkinson's in Europe today, including 12,000 people in Ireland.

The researchers will focus on parts of the cell, known as mitochondria, that malfunction in people with Parkinson's. Mitochondria contribute to cell death and neurodegeneration and there is growing evidence of their role in Parkinson's, but no effective treatments have been developed based on this knowledge.

The EU public-private partnership funding health research and innovation chose the project as it recognises that new, more effective treatments are urgently needed. The most common drug to treat Parkinson's used in Ireland is more than 50 years old, and no current treatment can stop, slow or reverse the condition.

The PD-MitoQUANT Coordinator is Professor Jochen Prehn, RCSI Chair of Physiology, Director of the RCSI Centre for Systems Medicine and Principal Investigator at FutureNeuro, the SFI Research Centre for Chronic and Rare Neurological Diseases. Professor Prehn said: "This project will join forces with top scientists in academia and industry to bring a fresh look on how we identify and test novel drugs for the treatment of this devastating movement disorder."

The key PD-MitoQUANT Investigators based at RCSI are Dr Niamh Connolly and Dr Orla Watters, Department of Physiology and Medical Physics and Centre for Systems Medicine, who will be focusing their research on Parkinson's in the coming years.

Dr Niamh Connolly commented: "While there are therapies currently available for Parkinson's, they do not improve all symptoms, nor do they slow or prevent disease progression over time.

"We hope that a systematic understanding of Parkinson's developed from this project will lead to improved tools for the early stages of drug development, so pharmaceutical companies can develop new treatments in the future," Dr Connolly said.

Professor Raymond Stallings, Director of Research and Innovation at RCSI said: "Research that informs improved treatments for patients is at the core of RCSI's mission to lead impactful research that addresses Irish and international health challenges such as Parkinson's. RCSI is proud to be the first Irish Institution to lead an Innovative Medicines Initiative project which is a testament to our strong expertise in high quality neurological research that drives advances to improve the lives of people with life-changing conditions."

The project involves 14 partners from nine countries, including:

- academic experts from: RCSI (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland); Institut du Cerveau et de la Moelle Epinière; German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases (DZNE); Neuroscience Institute of the National Research Council; University College London; Radboud University Nijmegen Medical Centre; the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
- SMEs: GeneXplain GmbH; Mimetas B.V.; Pintail Limited
- pharmaceutical companies from the EFPIA members: Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.; H. Lundbeck A/S and UCB S.A.

- patient advocacy organisation: Parkinson's UK

With the project kick-off meeting taking place this month, the project will run for three years, receiving €4.5m in funding from the EU's Horizon 2020 programme and €2.46m in-kind from European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) members and Parkinson's UK.

The project has been announced to coincide with National Brain Awareness Week which takes place from 11-17 March. loveyourbrain.ie #LoveYourBrain2019

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About RCSI

RCSI is ranked among the top 250 (top 2%) of universities worldwide in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2019) and its research is ranked first in Ireland for citations. It is an international not-for-profit health sciences institution, with its headquarters in Dublin, focused on education and research to drive improvements in human health worldwide. RCSI has been awarded Athena Swan Bronze accreditation for positive gender practice in higher education.

About PD-MitoQUANT www.pdmitoquant.eu

PD-MitoQUANT has received funding from the Innovative Medicines Initiative (www.imi.europa.eu) 2 Joint Undertaking under grant agreement No 821522. This Joint Undertaking receives support from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and EFPIA and Parkinson's UK.

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